



A Comparative Analysis of the Phenomenology of Women's Bodies in Conceptual Fashion from Mark Johnson's Perspective: A Case Study of the Works of Rei Kawakubo, Alexander McQueen, and Hussein Chalayan

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Clothing serves diverse roles and has a significant impact on social, personal, and cultural domains. In contemporary society, it is increasingly recognized as a nonverbal medium for the communication of profound ideas and concepts. The cultural and artistic revolutions of the 1960s played a pivotal role in the evolution of clothing as a vehicle for ideas and creative expression. During this period, an aesthetic revolution emerged, redefining perspectives on art and artistic creation. Consequently, conceptual art, which was a precursor to postmodern art, gained prominence, with ideas and concepts occupying the forefront. The objective of the artists in this movement was to actively engage the viewer's intellect, thereby incorporating the process of interpretation into the artwork.

This paradigm shift has expanded beyond the domain of art to encompass the fashion industry, resulting in conceptual fashion, a trend that is more rooted in the investigation of concepts and meanings than in pragmatic considerations. Conceptual fashion is characterized by the utilization of the human body and clothing to convey emotions and ideas. Designers in this sector sought to establish deeper connections with their audiences by utilizing the body's potential as a subject and a medium. This approach emphasizes the significance of phenomenology in understanding the relationship between the body and conceptual fashion. Some of the prominent designers in this field who have significantly influenced the development of conceptual fashion include Alexander McQueen, Rei Kawakubo, and Hussein Chalayan. These designers introduced new frameworks of artistic expression, deconstruction, and meaning-making by challenging traditional norms through their innovative approaches.

This study investigates the phenomenology of the body in a conceptual framework, examining it from both Eastern and Western perspectives. By analyzing the works of the aforementioned designers and applying Mark Johnson's theories, the research seeks to uncover the implicit and explicit relationships between the body and conceptual fashion. Based on their influence and relevance to the phenomenology of the body, two representative works from each designer were chosen. The objective of this analysis is to elucidate the intricate processes of meaning formation in a conceptual framework.

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative methodology, with an emphasis on the examination of selected works by three conceptual fashion designers. From a body-centered perspective, the investigation investigates the role of the body in their designs. The analysis commences with the definition of the body and its categorization in accordance with Mark Johnson's phenomenological framework.

The research employs a descriptive-analytical approach to assess the selected works, providing a comprehensive interpretation of their conceptual significance as phenomena. The selected designers produced seminal works and made significant progress in conceptual fashion during the period 1997–2007, during which the examined works were created.

Keywords:

Alexander McQueen,
Conceptual fashion, Hussein Chalayan, Phenomenology of Body, Rei Kawakubo.

The data were collected through documentary and library-based methods. The selected works were analyzed and interpreted using a theoretical framework that was centered on the body and an interpretive approach to their content. By integrating Mark Johnson's theories with the designers' creations, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the body, fashion, and meaning-making processes.

Results

Mark Johnson, a Modern phenomenologist, emphasizes the body's dynamic and multifaceted nature by highlighting five essential characteristics. He contends that the body should not be reduced to a mundane physical entity, but rather understood as a crucial element of the human experience. Four of Johnson's five fundamental characteristics of the body are examined in this study as they are depicted in the works of Chalayan, McQueen, and Kawakubo.

The concept of the ecological organism is particularly prevalent in a conceptual sense. Designers in this discipline endeavor to communicate abstract ideas and mental concepts through clothing and the body, thereby challenging the conventional dichotomy between the body and the mind. Conceptual fashion is frequently criticized for its impractical designs, but designers emphasize the intrinsic connection between the body and abstract concepts.

Through technological innovation and the inventive utilization of body capacities, the selected works of Kawakubo, McQueen, and Chalayan illustrate their investigation of the phenomenological body. Johnson defines the phenomenological body as a dynamic, living, sensory being that engages with its surroundings. This figure is a critical component of fashion shows, serving as a means of showcasing and designing innovative apparel.

The socio-cultural body, another of Johnson's concepts, was extensively examined in the case studies. This viewpoint emphasizes the cultural influences and interactions that influence the body's role in fashion. For example, Kawakubo's designs, for instance, challenge Western notions of gendered beauty by rejecting the idealized female figure in favor of alternative representations that are anchored in Eastern philosophy. Her art is designed to challenge the prevailing norms of Western fashion, which frequently establish rigid standards of wealth and beauty.

On the other hand, McQueen's wearable designs investigate novel conceptions of the body in the context of technological advancements. His creations redefine material processes and transform the body's function in fashion, challenging prevailing fashion trends and industry norms. Similarly, Chalayan's works underscore the interaction between the body, clothing, and objects, presenting them as modes of intellectual and emotive expression.

Conclusion

Hussein Chalayan, Alexander McQueen, and Rei Kawakubo are among the most prominent figures in conceptual fashion, and they are the designers of this study. Their works redefine fashion as an artistic medium, transcending conventional boundaries. By tackling topics such as ethnic diversity, the link between humans and technology, and the phenomenology of the body, these designers have significantly broadened the scope of fashion as a form of thought and expression.

The fashion industry's discriminatory perspectives on women's bodies were questioned by the creative methods of these designers, who employed conceptual fashion to critique and challenge these conventions. For instance, Kawakubo employed Eastern philosophy to question Western conceptions of femininity, whereas McQueen and Chalayan approached the same subjects through Western cultural frameworks. In doing so, they not only redefined the role of the body in fashion but also emphasized the agency and individuality of women, thereby empowering them.

In conclusion, this investigation underscores the body's critical role in conceptual fashion by demonstrating how designers can employ it to communicate complex ideas and challenge societal norms. By integrating theoretical insights with the analysis of influential works, the research provides a deeper understanding of the interplay between the body, fashion, and meaning-making processes in contemporary design.

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